EDNA PONTELLIER’S SELF ACTUALIZATION IN KATE CHOPIN’S
THE AWAKENING: A PSYCHOLOGICAL STUDY

AN UNDERGRADUATE THESIS

Presented as Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Sarjana Sastra
in English Letters

By
Bintang Berlianti

Student Number: 004214042
Student Registration Number: 001001145

ENGLISH LETTERS STUDY PROGRAMME
DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH LETTERS
FACULTY OF LETTERS
SANATA DHARMA UNIVERSITY
YOGYAKARTA
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April 16th, 2007
A Sarjana Sastra Undergraduate Thesis

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Defended before the Board of Examiners on April 25th, 2007 and Declared Acceptable

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Yogyakarta, April 30th, 2007
Faculty of Letters
Sanata Dharma University
Dean

DR. Fr. B. Alip, M.Pd., M.A.
“For everything there is a season,
And a time for every matter under heaven:
A time to be born, and a time to die;
A time to plant, and a time to pluck up what is planted;
A time to kill, and a time to heal;
A time to break down, and a time to build up;
A time to weep, and a time to laugh;
A time to mourn, and a time to dance;
A time to throw away stones, and a time to gather stones together;
A time to embrace, and a time to refrain from embracing;
A time to seek, and a time to lose;
A time to keep, and a time to throw away;
A time to tear, and a time to sew;
A time to keep silence, and a time to speak;
A time to love, and a time to hate;
A time for war, and a time for peace.”

Ecclesiastes 3: 1-8
This Undergraduate Thesis is dedicated to:

My beloved Father; Bambang Hendro Purnomo
and My beloved Mother; Zulaeha Fidktorina Sassy K

My elder sister; Retno Rembulan
and My younger sister; Asri Aning Ati

My Soul Mate; Rizki Pramudya
And My beloved Son; Brahmantyo Jagad Pramudya
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My special thankfulness and honor are dedicated to God Almighty Jesus Christ, My True Savior. I praise Him for His blessings for me.

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Bintang Berlianti
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ABSTRACT


This thesis discusses The Awakening by Kate Chopin. The novel presents a heroine who rebels against the Creole Society in order to actualize her self as a truly Artist. Edna Pontellier is a respectable woman of the late 1800s who not only acknowledges her sexual desires, but also has the strength and courage to act on them. Breaking through the role appointed to her by society, she discovers her own identity independent of her husband and children.

There are three problems to analyze. Firstly, the description of Edna Pontellier’s characterization. Secondly, how the society of the main character is described. Thirdly, how the people in the society influence the development of Edna’s effort toward self-actualization.

To complete the analysis, this thesis applies library research. It means that the writer uses books, theories, and any information related to the topic. Theories on character and characterization are applied to answer the first problem. Theories on society, character, characterization, behavior, and social influences on one’s behavior are employed for the second problem. Theories on behavior, social influence on one’s behavior, and self-actualization are applied to answer the third problem. The psychological approach is employed because the focus of this thesis is on the psychological interpretation of self-actualization, which is shown in the main character’s character development.

The analysis finds out that the main character has transformed from an ordinary housewife to an Artist. She deals with a process of actualizing her potentialities, characteristics and capabilities. Edna predicts the society around her will react to her ability, and the way she expresses her feelings, and relate her thoughts to others. The opinions of others are of little concern to Edna. She refuses to change herself in order to fit into the conservative life of the society. But somehow the society plays some significant role in the process of the main character’s self-actualization. Because the people Edna meets and the experiences she has on Grand Isle awaken desires and urges for music, sexual satisfaction, art, and freedom. The novel is an account of Edna’s movement out of ignorance into knowledge, the account of her quest to discover self, the moment when she begins to loosen all her repressed desires.
ABSTRAK


Tesis ini membahas The Awakening oleh Kate Chopin. Novel ini menyajikan seorang tokoh wanita yang memberontak terhadap masyarakat Creole dalam rangka mengaktualisasikan dirinya sebagai seorang seniman sejati. Edna Pontellier adalah seorang wanita terhormat di penghujung tahun 1800 yang tidak hanya sadar akan hasrat seksualnya, tetapi juga memiliki kekuatan dan keberanian dalam bertindak. Mematahkan peranan yang ditunjukkan masyarakat terhadap dirinya, dia menemukan jati dirinya terlepas dari suami dan anak-anaknya.


CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

A. Background of the Study

_The Awakening_ is a literary work by a woman about a woman. The vivid description of a woman’s feelings and intuition is the most attractive feature that came to the writer’s mind. To her opinion this feature could only have been produced naturally and originally by a female. The interesting thing in the novel, _The Awakening_, is the main character’s self actualization. Her self actualization is reflected in her behavior. She stands for herself, trusts herself, and dares to express her opinion, although her society disagrees with her behavior. One, who is courageous to be consistent in maintaining his/her action, trust his/her own judgment, and work on it, is considered as a self-actualizing person. As what S.I. Hayakawa explains in _Symbol, Status, and Personality_ that a self-actualizing person does not let his society or environment hamper him from doing his will (1950:56).

_The Awakening_ was first published on April 22, 1899 in New Orleans, Louisiana. It was immediately condemned on moral grounds. Soon after its publication, the novel was banned from libraries in St. Louis, Louisiana. The author was also rejected from the local arts club whose members were mostly prominent critics, readers, and local dignitaries. Also, she was even shunned by some of her friends. All of the rejections were mainly based on the impression that the novel was about female emancipation and dealt with infidelity, sexual
passion, adultery, conflict in marriage, despair and suicide. The contents of the novel were considered outrageous according to the Victorian moral standards espoused by New Orleans society of that time. The people labeled the novel a “yellow novel,” an “Erotic novel.”

At that time, people in New Orleans, especially the Creoles, believed that the women were the property of men. Their duty was to be “the angel in the house and to name their babies.” As Margaret Culley in her book *The Context of The Awakening* says that

Most married ladies in New Orleans where the novel set were the property of their husband… The wife was bound to live with her husband, and follow him wherever he (chose) to reside (p.218).

It can be understood that introducing a novel like *The Awakening* into such a society might appear to be morally irresponsible. *The Awakening* was ahead of its time. For almost half a century after its publication the novel was ignored by critics. Then in 1956, Kenneth Eble rediscovered it. In 1962 Edmund Wilson brought the novel to the attention of a larger audience than Eble could have reached. In his literary criticism George M. Spangler writes:

What gives the novel its distinction is the subtlety and finesse with which the author presents the psychological development of Mrs. Pontellier (the protagonist) and the force and sustained power with which she reveals that development (1970:249).

The writer is interested to explore the topic of this thesis because the answer of the topic will help the readers understand the main character’s feeling, intuition, emotions. By reading the novel we can see that Edna Pontellier has a
passion, a dream to be free as an individual. She rejected to be treated as an object (by her husband). By studying this topic, the readers may get broader knowledge and understanding from the literary works. In their book, *Fiction: An Introduction to Reading and Writing*, Edgar V. Roberts and Henry E. Jacobs say that,

> Literature helps us grow, both personally and intellectually; it provides an objective based on our knowledge and understanding; it helps us connect ourselves to the broader cultural, philosophic, and religious world of which we are a part; it enables us to recognize human dreams and struggles in different places and times that we would never otherwise know (1989:2).

In her thesis, the writer explains how one’s self-actualization will keep on holding out even though many factors influence her to change the behavior.

**B. Problem Formulation**

In order to analyze the novel, the writer limits the discussion into three problems formulated as follows:

1. How is the main character characterized in the novel?
2. How is the society in which the main character lives described?
3. How do several characters in the society influence the development of Edna’s effort toward self-actualization?

**C. Objectives of the Study**

The aim of this thesis is to find out the way the main character’s self-actualization is developed in the novel through her behavior, actions, and relations with the other characters though her society seems to hampers the main character
to actualize herself. In order to achieve the objective, there are some steps that
need to be done. First is describing the characterization of Edna Pontellier. Her
characterization will be drawn in order to understand who she really is. The
second is trying to find out how the society of the main character is described in
the novel. The answer will be useful to understand what kind of society that the
main character deals with. The third is trying to reveal how several characters in
the society influence the development of Edna’s effort toward self-actualization.

D. Definition of Terms

In order to understand the word that is used in this thesis and to make a
better understanding, the writer presents the explanation of the word. There is one
term that needs to be defined, that is “self-actualization.”

In the Duane’s Schultz’s *Growth of Psychology: Model of the Healthy
Personality*, Carl R. Roger explains that “self-actualization” is the process of
becoming oneself, of developing one’s unique psychological characteristics and
potentialities. The tendency to actualize, as a motivating force, is much stronger
than the pain and struggle and any accompanying urge to cease the effort to
develop (1977: 28).
CHAPTER II

THEORETICAL REVIEW

A. Review of Related Studies

*The Awakening* was published in 1899, and it immediately created a controversy. Contemporaries of Kate Chopin (1851-1904) were shocked by her depiction of a woman with active sexual desires, who dares to leave her husband and have an affair. Instead of condemning her protagonist, Chopin maintains a neutral, non-judgmental tone throughout and appears to even condone her character's unconventional actions. Kate Chopin was socially ostracized after the publication of her novel, which was almost forgotten until the second half of the twentieth century. *The Awakening* has been reclaimed by late twentieth-century theorists who see Edna Pontellier as the prototypical feminist. A woman before her time, Edna questions the institution of marriage, (at one point she describes a wedding as 'one of the most lamentable spectacles on earth') has sexual desires of her own, and becomes completely independent of her husband. ([http://www.english-literature.org/essays/chopin.html](http://www.english-literature.org/essays/chopin.html))

Emily Toth's, *A New Biographical Approach*, shows the social significance of *The Awakening*, for women in the 1890's. She briefly discusses the reaction of society and the criticism the novel received after being published. Toth explains that *The Awakening* was "condemned," mostly by "male critics, editors, and gatekeepers," eventually resulting in ending Kate Chopin's literary career. Female scholars however, saw Chopin's work in a positive light and "praised the book's artistry." This proves that the novel addressed powerful issues between
men and women in society and served as a statement for women during the late 1800's.

As a reader, it is obvious that the major theme of *The Awakening* is the main character's realization of life. Edna Pontellier goes through changes, in which she abandons all expectations from her husband and society in general. The fact that Edna is a woman, ignoring her duties as a mother and a wife, to explore life and find herself, appalled the male critics of the late nineteenth century. This type of behavior was not allowed for women during this time. They were to be proper, loving wives, and good mothers to their children. By stating that Chopin's career was ended as a consequence of publishing *The Awakening* and presenting a woman who challenges societal norms, Toth conveys the novel as a convincing piece, which frightened male critics and society as a whole.

A contemporary review from the St. Louis Post-Dispatch, by C.L. Deyo, published on May 20, 1899, is helpful in analyzing and tracing the main characters awakening, from its beginning to end (Edna's death). The article stated that Edna was aroused when Robert Lebrun "revealed her to herself." Edna was not treated like a person by her husband, but rather a decorative piece of property. After Robert left to Mexico, Edna continues to open her eyes to life.

The review also mentions society's objections to Edna's experiences, and suggests a lack of courage in facing society as the reason Edna sacrifices herself to the sea. Edna realized her worth and passion for life. She also wanted passion in a loving relationship, but her feeling of passion and love could not be provided by her husband, Robert, or any man. As result, Edna's unwillingness to sacrifice
passion and longing for love, left her empty and more hopeless than before the "awakening." Edna could not function or survive in society, unfulfilled. Therefore, "she swam out into the sun kissed gulf" and lets herself drown. Lucy Monroe mentions some minor themes within The Awakening, in a review published March, 1899, in Book News. Monroe discusses the unity of women throughout the novel and how accurately it reveals life. It is true that the women characters have a bond. They give advice, hide secrets, and discuss their problems with each other. The Awakening also depicts Louisiana Creole life, clearly and precisely. The novel displays leisure class activity and the abundance of free time such people posses.

(http://www.studyworld.com/newsite/reportessay/literature/novel/theawakening-38946.htm)

B. Review of Related Theories

1. Theory on Character and Characterization

According to M.H. Abrams in his book, A Glossary of Literary Terms, characters means the persons presented in a dramatic or narrative work. Endowed with moral, dispositional, and emotional of qualities that are expressed in what they say and do (1985:23).

Based on the importance, characters are categorized into two ways, namely major and minor characters. Major character is the center of the story. Usually the acts of the story are focused on the main character from the beginning to the end of the story. Roger B. Henkle writes in Reading the Novel: An
Introduction to the Techniques of Interpreting Fiction that a major character is the most complex character in the story. She can be described as such a character through the complexity of the characterization (1977:87).

M.J. Murphy in his book Understanding Unseens: An Introduction to English Poetry and English Novel for Overseas Students (1972: 161-173) illustrates some ways in representing the characters. The author attempts to make his characters understandable and come alive for the readers:

a. **Personal description**

To describe the character, the author explains physical appearances of the characters. The description is often related to her psychological condition. The personality itself can be reflected from the external appearance.

b. **Character as seen by another**

Instead of describing, the author can directly describe the character through the opinion of another. Other characters will give explanation about what the character is like. Other’s thought about a certain character can be significant factor to build understanding of her.

c. **Speech**

The author can give us insight into the thought through what the character says. Whenever a person is speaking, she is giving the readers some clue to his character.
d. Past life

By learning about a person’s past life, the author can give the reader a clue that has help to shape a person’s character. The character past life is always closely connected to her present life.

e. Conversation with others

The author can give us clues to a person’s character through conversations of other people and the things they say about her. We need to pay attention toward the conversations of other characters. It is useful to go to speech-by-speech to determine exactly what it is meant or implied by each of them.

f. Reaction

The character shows her personality from her reactions to various situations and events.

g. Direct comment

By giving to the reader a straightforward description about comment on the character.

h. Thoughts

We follow the inner life of the mind and then make the association of the ideas. In brief, we are facilitated to disclose the thought inside the characters’ mind.

i. Mannerism

The author may describe a person’s mannerism that may also represent the characters.
2. The Relation between Literature and Psychology

In reading literary works, the readers may analyze the works by relating the works with any psychological theories that are suitable. In the literary works, there are things that can be analyzed by psychological theories such as, human life, personality, behavior, emotion, idea, action, etc. As John M. Ellis explains in his book, *The Theory of Literary Criticism: A Logical Analysis* that,

The discipline is able to contribute much to the study of literature. The disciplines that would appear to be the most useful to literary study must be those that will assist us in analyzing both literary text and their function in human life and society (1974:249).

Characters in literary works can be related to what happens in life as real subjects. There is a distinctive relation between the works and the writer. The writer can draw her idea, thought, and feeling through her works. As Rene Wellek and Austin Warren explain in their book, *Theory of Literature*, that

“By ‘psychology of literature’, we may mean the psychological study of the writer, as type and as individual, or the study of the creative process, or the study of the psychological types and laws present within works of literature, or, finally, the effect of literature upon its readers (audience psychology)” (1956:81).

In this thesis, the writer focuses the discussion on the study of the psychological types and laws present within works of literature.

3. Theory on Society

According to Charles A. Elwood in Howard W. Odum’s *Understanding Society: The Principles of Dynamic Sociology*, “Society is any group of individuals who carry on a common life by means of mental interaction.”
(1947:33). He explains that a society is a collection of individuals who are united by certain relations and motivations. It is the composition of people and processes in transition and change, striving for survival and progress. Individuals form arrangement of relationships and activities in order to maintain the relation within their interaction.

Society is the place where people live in. In the society, people live, interact, respond, and communicate with others. Society is also a medium that transmits values from one generation to the next through the socialization process and interaction between each member of the society. Through these two processes, the members of the society will learn and apply it to their behavior in which elicits a response of esteem. As Gordon C. Zahn states in his What is Society? That,

Society is the framework of the people’s association together and the measure of what they achieve in culture, technology, and civilization. It can be visualized as the behavior of human beings and the consequent problems of relationships and adjustment that arise (1964:5-9).

He states that the shapes of the communal existence where people live in period of time, they can produce sets of culture, norms, and regulations as the society’s competence to regulate its people; The competence to force any person to obey the norms and culture of the society by giving sanctions. Therefore, changing the norms and culture of the society needs time. One cannot directly force the society to change its built and organized norms and culture.

In the book Personality and Problems of Adjustment, Kimbal Young stated that,
“A society is the broadest association of people who posses a certain common set of habits, attitudes, ideas, that are sufficient to hold them unite, who live in a definite territory, and who are often set off from other societies by attitudes and habits of difference or antagonism” (1945:125).

Society is the place where people can interact one another. People who live in a certain society form norms, rules, culture, and customs in order to maintain existence of the society. They are made in order to prevent and omit any resistance and rebellion that may destruct the existence of the society.

4. Theory on Behavior

In line with the topic, this thesis deals with the main character’s self-actualization as reflected in her behavior in the novel. Before going further, the writer gives some theories of behavior.

Behavior is an action or movement that is influenced by any objects, events, and situations where the person is. Behavior is one’s response toward the circumstances around him. As James W. Vander Zanden says in his book, Social Psychology that behavior is the tendency or disposition to act in certain ways with reference to some object, event, or situation (1984: 61).

One’s behavior is also related with his actions in responding to his own examination and evaluation on the object that the person deals with. It is all about the good or bad judgment about the object that is shown in his actions. This is alike what Kelly G. Shaver says in her book, Principles of Psychology that “Behavior is the predisposition to respond which reflects both the beliefs about the object and the evaluative judgments made of the object” (1977:169).
The establishment of the behavior does not come from the individual himself, but its development is closely related to the social circumstances and any influences that may affect his behavior. One develops his behavior in accordance with his interactions with his society. This is strengthened by Charles Taylor’s theory of Stimulus-Response in his book, *The Explanation of Behaviour* that the stimulus and the response may affect the development of the behavior. The Stimulus-Response theory starts from the intuitively recognized fact that human’s behavior is a function of a situation in which human are placed. Someone’s behavior may change or develop when he/she gets the stimulus that influences his action. The stimulus is anything that the human has, such as attention, thought, ideas, knowledge, or any problems or situations that one deals with (1965:111-115).

In the theory above, Charles Taylor explains that any stimulus from the environment may stimulate the person to act and respond. The appearance of the stimulus is important. The stimulus from outer part of the person such as social behavior, custom, or any other social stimulus can influence the person in the development of his behavior.

5. Theory on Social Influence on One’s Behavior

In this thesis, the writer also concerned about the understanding of the wide range of conditions that shape the self-actualization of the main character as reflected in her behavior. Dealing with the observation on the main character’s behavior relating to the society, the writer takes some theories on the influences of
social behavior on one’s behavior. As it is stated in Robert A. Baron and Don Byrne’s book, *Social Psychology: Understanding Human Interaction* (1974: 11-13) that social behavior is shaped by a seemingly endless list of variables. They give some numbers of specific factors influencing one’s behavior are large, however, they appear that most fall into five major categories as follows.

a. **The Behavior and Characteristics of Other Persons.**

The observable characteristics of other persons strongly affect one’s feelings, thoughts, and behavior. One often reacts differently to highly attractive persons that to unattractive ones.

b. **Social Cognition (One’s thoughts, attitude, and inferences about other people around him).**

Thoughts, beliefs, attitudes, and memories about other persons are important factors in communicating with other people.

c. **Ecological Variables (Direct and indirect influences physical environment).**

Such factors such as the condition of the environment, for example: condition of house, city, water system, environment, air, etc.

d. **The Socio Cultural Context in which the Social Behavior Occurs.**

Such factors as cultural norms (Rules about how people should behave in the society). Shifting societal standards or values can influence one’s behavior.

e. **Aspects of One’s Biological Nature Relevant to Social Behavior.**

Inherited aspects of one’s physical appearance, built-in limits to one’s capacity to process social information.
There are some factors that may influence one’s behavior in his society. The first one is the behavior and characteristics of other persons. The position of one in the high position in society, can strongly affect one’s behavior. If the person has charisma, then it will be easy for him to influence other people to follow what he asks them to do. The next one is the factor of minds, ideas, and judgments on other people. If someone has a good judgment on other people, then he will follow or imitate other’s behavior. The third one is social ecological circumstances around the person. For example, if the person lives in the place where he feels comfortable there, he will have an unchanged behavior. On the other hand, if the person lives in the place where he feels hard to live there, then he may a certain behavior that leads him to change the condition to be better. The next one is the social norms and cultures that strongly affect one’s behavior. A man cannot live alone, he has to build a relationship with other people, by then the society with its norms, regulation, and culture will affect how he/she could behave. The last factor is the physical condition of the person himself. His ability to accept any social information and stimulus will help him a lot to change his behavior and intimate or adopt the social behavior.

6. Theory of Self-Actualization

Carl R. Roger explains in Duane Schultz’s *Growth Psychology: Model of the Healthy Personality* that self-actualization is the process of becoming one self, of developing one’s unique psychological characteristics and potentialities. He believes that humans have an innate urge to create and that the most important
creative product is one’s own self. The tendency to actualize, as a motivating force, is much stronger than the pain and struggle and any accompanying urge to cease the effort to develop. The self-actualization is determined by social rather than biological forces (1977:27-28).

Self-actualization is not based on the biological factors of one, but on the social factors around him/her. One who is eager to express and act what he thinks and interest is considered as the self-actualizing person. Being one of the parts of a society, one should not only receive and accept any influence passively. He should dare to be himself and to actualize his own idea, characteristics, and potentialities without any interference from other people.

Carl R. Roger also adds that there are some points on a self-actualizing person. Firstly, self-actualizing is ongoing; it is never a finished or static condition. Secondly, self-actualizing is a difficult and at times painful process. It involves a continuous testing, stretching, and prodding of all a person’s capabilities. Thirdly, a self-actualizing person is that he is truly himself. He does not hide behind masks or facades, pretending to be something he is not or shielding a part of himself. However, a self-actualizing person is not openly aggressive, rebellious or deliberately unconventional in flouting the rules of the society (1977:31-32).

Becoming a self-actualizing person is not instant, something that just happens soon. It deals with a process of actualizing his potentialities, characteristics and capabilities; one may face difficulties and obstacles from other people who are contrary with what one actualizes. One’s endurance to be eager to
fight against difficulties is needed in this process. A self-actualizing person is a person who deals with truth. He does not try to hide in masks and lies. A self-actualizing person stands on what he thinks is right. He says the truth is truth and the falsehood is falsehood according to him. He may be hindered by any sanctions from his society. However, self-actualizing person is able to endure with the obstacles. He is also not rebellious and aggressive in realizing his will. A self-actualizing person’s aim is not to ruin the existence of his society or hurt others feeling.

Carl R. Roger (1977: 31-35) also gives five specific characteristics of a self-actualizing person as follows:

a. An Openness to Experience

He is able to use his experiences in opening up new avenues of perception and expression.

b. Existential Living

A self-actualizing person is open to everything at the moment and it finds in each experience a structure that can change easily in response to the next moment’s experience. A self-actualizing person is adaptable because the self-structure is constantly open to new experiences.

c. Trust in One’s Own Self

There is great deal of spontaneity and freedom in such behavior but it is not the same as acting rashly or with total disregard for the consequences. A self-actualizing person comes to trust his decisions as he trusts himself.
d. A Sense of Freedom

A self-actualizing person is the person who experiences freedom of choice and of action. He is able to choose freely, with an absence of constraints or inhibitions, between alternative courses of thought and action. He enjoys a sense of personal power about life and believes that the future is dependent upon himself or herself, not directed by whim, circumstance, or past events.

e. Creativity

A self-actualizing person expresses himself in creative products and creative living in all spheres of his existence. Creative, spontaneous person is not noted for conformity or for passive adjustment to social and cultural constraints. A self-actualizing person is spontaneous in his behavior, changing, growing, and developing in response to the rich stimuli of life around him. Since the self-actualizing person lacks of defensiveness, he is not concerned about possible approbation from others for his behavior.

A self-actualizing person is open to any new experiences. He is not trapped by old traditions and norms. If he is interested in certain new things, he will examine them. A self-actualizing person is interested in everything that happens at present and he finds in each experience of structure that changes easily in responding to the next moment’s experience. He is also careful with any consequences in dealing with what he does. He does not act rashly in doing his will. A self-actualizing person trusts himself. A self-actualizing person thinks that he has a freedom of choice and action. He does not passively conform to his society. Any pressure will not easily change his behavior. He is also not a
defensive person. He does not make a problem out of whether other people will accept his action or not, as long as he can actualize himself.

S.I. Hayakawa also explains in his book, *Symbol, Status, and Personality* that “A self-actualizing person never allows convention to hamper him or inhibit him from doing anything that he considers very important and basic” (1950:56). It means that a self-actualizing person will give all his efforts to do his will. Although other people, norms, and rules are contrary to him, he stands on his own. Things that he thinks are right and important will be fully considered.

Dr. Abraham Maslow coined the term “Self-Actualization” as the pinnacle in the hierarchy of human needs. Dr. Maslow summed up the concept as follows:

"A musician must make music, an artist must paint, a poet must write, if he is to be at peace with himself. What a man can be, he must be. This is the need we may call self-actualization ... It refers to man's desire for fulfillment, namely to the tendency for him to become actually in what he is potentially: to become everything that one is capable of becoming ..."
Characteristics of Self Actualizing People according to Dr. Abraham Maslow:

1. Realistic

Realistically oriented, a Self-Actualizing (SA) person has a more efficient perception of reality, and has comfortable relations with it. This is extended to all areas of life. A Self-Actualizing person is unthreatened and unfrightened by the unknown. He has a superior ability to reason, to see the truth, and is logical and efficient.

2. Self Acceptance

Accepts himself, others and the natural world the way they are. Sees human nature as is, has a lack of crippling guilt or shame, enjoys himself without regret or apology, and has no unnecessary inhibitions.

3. Spontaneity, Simplicity, Naturalness

Spontaneous in his inner life. Thoughts and impulses are unhampered by convention. His ethics are autonomous, and Self-actualizing individuals are motivated to continual growth.

4. Focus of Problem Centering

A Self-actualizing person focuses on problems and people outside of himself. He has a mission in life requiring much energy, as it is his sole reason for existence. He is serene, characterized by a lack of worry, and is devoted to duty.

5. Detachment: The Need for Privacy

The Self-actualized person can be alone and not be lonely, is unflappable, and retains dignity amid confusion and personal misfortunes, all the
while remaining objective. He is a self-starter, is responsible for himself, and owns his behavior.

6. Autonomy: Independent of Culture and Environment

The SA person has a fresh rather than stereotyped appreciation of people and the basic good in life. Moment to moment living for him is thrilling, transcending, and spiritual as he lives the present moment to the fullest.

7. Peak Experiences

"Feelings of limitless horizons opening up to the vision, the feeling of being simultaneously more powerful and also more helpless than one ever was before, the feeling of ecstasy and wonder and awe, the loss of placement in time and space with, finally, the conviction that something extremely important and valuable had happened, so that the subject was to some extent transformed and strengthened even in his daily life by such experiences."

8. Interpersonal Relations

Identification, sympathy, affection for mankind, kinship with the good, bad, and ugly are all traits of the SA person. Truth is clear to him as he can see things others cannot. He has profound, intimate relationships with few and is capable of greater love than others consider possible as he shares his benevolence, affection, and friendliness with everyone.

9. Democratic Values and Attitudes

The SA person is able to learn from anyone, is humble and friendly with anyone regardless of class, education, political belief, race or color.
10. Discrimination: Means and Ends, Good and Evil

The SA does not confuse between means and ends and does no wrong. He enjoys the here and now, getting to goal--not just the result. He makes the most tedious task an enjoyable game and has his own inner moral standards (appearing amoral to others).

11. Philosophical, Unhostile Sense of Humor

Jokes to the SA person are teaching metaphors, intrinsic to the situation and are spontaneous. He can laugh at himself, but he never makes jokes that hurt others.

12. Creativity

The SA person enjoys an inborn uniqueness that carries over into everything he does, is original, inventive, uninhibited, and he sees the real and true more easily.

13. Resistance to Enculturation: Transcendence of any Particular Culture

SA people have an inner detachment from culture. Although folkways may be observed, SA people are not controlled by them. Working for long-term culture improvement, indignation with injustice, inner autonomy, outer acceptance, and the ability to transcend the environment rather than just cope are intrinsic to SA people.

14. Imperfections

SA people are painfully aware of their own imperfections and joyfully aware of their own growth process. They are impatient with themselves when stuck and feel real life pain as a result.
15. Values

The SA person is realistically human due to a philosophical acceptance of self, human nature, social life, physical reality, and nature.

16. Resolution of Dichotomies

Polar opposites merge into a third, higher phenomenon as though the two have united; therefore, opposite forces are no longer felt as conflict. To the SA person work becomes play and desires are in excellent accord with reason. The SA person retains his childlike qualities yet is very wise.

Another concept of self-actualization associated with Abraham Maslow says that Self-actualizing people are involved in a cause outside their own skin - having a calling. They devote their lives to the search for the fourteen (14) Being Values, such as: truth, beauty, goodness, perfection, simplicity, comprehensiveness, human love, etc.

Behaviors leading to Self Actualization according to Dr. Abraham Maslow:

1. Experiencing fully, vividly, selflessly.
2. Making a series of progression choices rather than regression choices: being honest with oneself and others, etc.
3. Recognize you are a unique self, and express your uniqueness consciously.
4. When in doubt, be honest rather than not.
5. Dare to be different, unpopular, nonconformist, if that's how you feel.
6. Actualize/achieve your potential - work to do well the thing you want to do.
7. Set up conditions so that Peak Experience(s) are more likely.

8. Identify and give up your defenses blocking the way to self-knowledge.


Maslow says there are two processes necessary for self-actualization: self-exploration and action. The deeper the self-exploration, the closer one comes to self-actualization. (http://www.performance-unlimited.com/samain.htm).

C. Theoretical Framework

The analysis takes some theories to answer the problems proposed in the problem formulation. There are theories of character and characterization, relation between literature and psychology, and self-actualization.

To relate the novel with the psychological theories, the writer presents theories on relation between literature and psychology. These theories are utilized as the basic for the writer to analyze the study psychologically and use psychological theories on the study.

Because the study is on the main character, therefore the analysis needs the theories on character and characterization in order to understand on her characteristics and before analyzing her self-actualization. This thesis learns the characterization and characteristics of the main character by examining the dialogue, actions, and other characters’ opinion on the main character. By analyzing the characterization of the main character first, the writer can make this as the basic before analyzing her self-actualization. These are the theories presented to complete the analysis and to guide the research to find the answer of
the problems. To support all those theories, the writer uses psychological approach. The function of the approach is to give direction and guidance for analyzing the questions appearing in the problem formulation.
CHAPTER III
METHODODOLOGY

A. Object of the Study

This thesis analyzes Kate Chopin’s novel *The Awakening*. The novel was first published in 1899 by Herbert S. Stone and Co. of Chicago. The novel has 125 pages. The text which is being analyzed by the writer published by Signet Classic, a division of Penguin Books USA Inc, first printing on April, 1976, and edited by Barbara H. Solomon.

Chopin explores the theme of illusion and reality in her final novel, *The Awakening*. The story of Edna Pontellier was criticized as immoral, vulgar, morbid, and was even called "sex fiction." Willa Cather called the book "a Creole 'Bovary','" and said, "next time I hope that Miss Chopin will devote that flexible iridescent style of hers to a better cause." Influenced by French writers like Gustave Flaubert, Chopin defended her novel: "I never dreamed of Mrs. Pontellier making such a mess of things and working out her own damnation as she did. If I had the slightest intimation of such a thing I would have excluded her from the company. But, when I found out what she was up to, the play was half over and it was too late."

By exploring Edna's life and death, Chopin was breaking down barriers, challenging beliefs and conceptions of marriage, love, happiness, and even the very presence of being. After the uproar that ended Chopin's career, she was banned from an arts club and she lost friends. Although there is some debate about how serious the "book banning" of *The Awakening* really was, it's certain that the
book and its author were almost forgotten. Rediscovered in the 1960s and 1970s, Chopin's scandalous novel is now considered an important classic.

*The Awakening* is now recognized as an indispensable addition to the ranks of feminist literature. Chopin offers a glimpse into solitude that goes far beyond simply being alone. She writes: "The voice of the sea is seductive; never ceasing, whispering, clamoring, murmuring, inviting the soul to wander for a spell in abyss of solitude; to lose itself in mazes of inward contemplation." The sea is seductive, calling to Edna until finally she listens to the voice of the sea: "She grew daring and reckless, over-estimating her strength. She wanted to swim far out, where no woman had swam before."

In the end, it is Kate Chopin who swam out in the sea of literature. She was lost there and was almost forgotten. Now, Library of America brings the remnants of Kate Chopin's works back to life, allowing us to read never-before-seen works.

(http://classiclit.about.com/cs/productreviews/fr/aafpr_chopinawa_2.htm)

**B. Approach of the Study**

In relation to the topic of this thesis, the writer applies the psychological approach in analyzing the development of the self-actualization of the main character.

According to Wilfred L. Guerin in his book, *A Handbook of Critical Approach to Literature*, the psychological approach was perhaps the most controversial, the most abused and the least appreciated. However, the
psychological approach can be fascinating and rewarding since its proper application to interpret the literary work can enhance the researchers’ understanding and appreciation of literature (1999: 125). The approach lets the readers to analyze psychologically the characters or situations in the literary works.

Samuel H. Woods and Mary Rorhberger also explain that psychological approach is an approach to literature “The psychological approach involves the effort to locate and demonstrate certain recurrent patterns” (1971: 13). It refers to a different body of knowledge that is psychology. The approach is applied when the attention is focused on the psychological interpretation for enhancing the understanding and appreciation of literature. By using this approach, then psychological theories are used as interpretative tools.

The reason why the writer chooses this approach in analyzing the topic is because the writer studies the psychological aspects of the main character of the novel, and then the psychological approach is the most appropriate approach.

C. Method of the Study

In completing the analysis, the writer applied library or desk research. It means that the data were collected from the books, theories about literature, criticism, and any other information that enriched the study.

There were two kinds of sources that were used in this study. The first was the primary source that was the novel itself as the main source of this study. The secondary sources were taken in order to support the analysis of the study. They
were theories on literary works and some psychological theories for the analysis. Theories that were used in this study for example, theories on character and characterization by M. H. Abrams in his book, *A Glossary of Literary Terms* and M. J. Murphy in his book, *Understanding Unseens: An Introduction to English Poetry and English Novel for Overseas Students*. In order to relate the study with psychological theories, then theories on relation between literature and psychology by John M. Ellis in his book *The Theory of Literary Criticism* and Renne Wellek and Austin Warren in *Theory of Literature* are utilized. Theories on society by Gordon C. Zahn in *What is society?* and also from Kimbal Young in *Personality and Problems of Adjustment*. Other theories were the psychological theories on behavior for example, James W. Vander Zanden in his book, *Social Psychology*. Theory on social influences on one’s behavior by Robert A. Baron and Donn Byrne in *Social Psychology: Understanding Human Interaction* were also applied. The writer also uses the theories on self-actualization by Carl R. Roger in Duane Schultz’s *Growth Psychology: Model of the Healthy Personality* and S.I. Hayakawa in *Symbol, Status, and Personality*. In order to get a clear definition on self-actualization, the writer uses the theories written by Dr. Abraham Maslow.

The study took some steps in order to answer the problems. The first step was to read and re-read the novel as the primary data of the study until the writer got a full comprehension of it, by focusing the attention on the main character’s self-actualization as reflected in her behavior. Her speech, thoughts, ideas, and actions lead to the comprehension of her self-actualization development.
Secondly, this study obtained theories on character and characterization, society, behavior, social influences on one’s behavior, and also theories on self-actualization. The theories were used in order to make a deeper analysis of how the self-actualization of the main character is developed as reflected in her behavior though the society’s reactions are contrary to what the main character actualizes.

Thirdly, the writer answered the problem formulations that lead to the understanding of the topic based on the theories proposed before. The first problem is about how the main character is characterized in the play. The second problem explains how the society of the main character is described. And the third problem is how several characters in the society influence the development of the main character’s (Edna) effort toward self-actualization. Theories on character and characterization are applied to answer the first problem. Theories on society, character, characterization, behavior, and social influences on one’s behavior are employed for the second problem. Theories on behavior, social influence on one’s behavior, and self-actualization are applied to answer the third problem. The psychological approach is employed because the focus of this thesis is on the psychological interpretation of Self-Actualization that is shown in the main character’s character development. Finally, the conclusion could be drawn based on the analysis.
CHAPTER IV

ANALYSIS

This chapter presents the analysis of the problems already proposed. There are three problems that need to be analyzed. The first problem is about how the main character is characterized in the play. The second problem explains how the society of the main character is described. And the third is trying to reveal how several characters in the society influence the development of Edna’s effort toward self-actualization.

A. The Characterization of Edna Pontellier

Edna Pontellier is a respectable woman of the late 1800s who not only acknowledges her sexual desires, but also has the strength and courage to act on them. Breaking through the role appointed to her by society, she discovers her own identity independent of her husband and children. Many of Kate Chopin’s other stories feature passionate, unconventional female protagonists, but none presents a heroine as openly rebellious as Edna. The details and specifics of Edna’s character are the key to understand the novel and its impact on generations of readers.

At the beginning of the novel, Edna exists in a sort of semi-conscious state. She is comfortable in her marriage to Léonce and unaware of her own feelings and ambitions. Edna felt that her marriage to Léonce is the end to her life of passion and the beginning of a life of responsibility. But later on the novel we
can see that Edna learns that her husband was just a person she married without love as an excuse (p.77).

In her youth Edna has always been a romantic, enamored with a cavalry officer at a very young age, in love with a man visiting a neighboring plantation in her teens, and infatuated with a tragedian as a young woman.

“…She remembered that she had been passionately enamored of a dignified and sad-eyed cavalry officer who visited her father in Kentucky.” At another time her affections were deeply engaged by a young gentleman who visited a lady on a neighboring plantation (p. 17).

Although she expected her dreams of romance to disappear along with her youth, her fantasies and yearnings only remain latent, re-emerging on Grand Isle in the form of her passion for Robert Lebrun.

As Edna walk along the street she was thinking of Robert. She was still under the spell of her infatuation. She had tried to forget him, realizing the inutility of remembering. But the thought of him was like an obsession, ever pressing itself upon her. …; it was his being, his existence, which dominated her thought, fading sometimes as if it would melt into the mist of forgotten, reviving again with an intensity. Which filled her with an incomprehensible longing (p. 54).

The people Edna meets and the experiences she has on Grand Isle awaken desires and urge for music, sexual satisfaction, art, and freedom that she can no longer bear to keep hidden. Like a child, Edna begins to see the world around her with a fresh perspective, forgetting the behavior expected of her and ignoring the effects of her unconventional actions. As what Adèle Ratignolle, her friend, once said to her:

“In some way you seem to me like a child, Edna. You seem to act without a certain amount of reflection which is necessary in this life (p. 96).
Edna is often childish as well as childlike: she harbors unrealistic dreams about the possibilities of a wild adulterous romance without consequences, and she fails to consider the needs and desires of anyone but herself. Her flagrant disregard of reality is revealed when she mocks Robert’s apprehensions about adultery, and when she leaves her children in the care of their grandmother without a second thought. Edna’s independence frequently amounts to selfishness.

She was fond of her children in an uneven, impulsive way. She would sometimes gather them passionately to her heart; she would sometimes forget them. The year before they had spent part of the summer with their grandmother Pontellier in Iberville. Feeling secure regarding their happiness and welfare, she did not miss them except with an occasional intense longing. Their absence was a sort of relief, though she did not admit this, even to herself. It seemed to free her of a responsibility which she had blindly assumed and for which fate had not fitted her (p. 18).

Yet although the text never presents Edna’s escape from tradition as heroic, it also never declares her actions shameful. The narrative may sometimes portray Edna as selfish in the ways she acts out her defiance of convention, but it never portrays Edna’s defiance itself as intrinsically wrong. Perhaps, even, the novel portrays Edna’s rebellion as intrinsically right. Given the book’s ambiguity, Edna’s decision to commit suicide at the end of the novel can be read either as an act of cowardice—of submission to thoughts of her sons’ reputations and to a sense that life has become too difficult—or as an act of final rebellion—of refusal to sacrifice her integrity by putting her life in the hands of controlling powers.

B. The Description of the Society
The society in the novel is described as a conservative upper class Creole family. Society of the nineteenth-century gave a heightened meaning to what it meant to be a woman. According to the commonly known 'code of true womanhood', women were supposed to be docile, domestic creatures, whose main concerns in life were to be the raising of their children and submissiveness to their husbands. In Kate Chopin's *The Awakening*, Edna Pontellier has turned down these expected roles, and, consequently, suffer because of it. Léonce Pontellier, entirely because he stands to represent patriarchal society, is a great deal to blame for his wife rebellions. In the first scene of *The Awakening*, after being scolded by her husband about not being a good mother, Edna responds by crying, and later with defiance, refusing to come in to sleep, according to her husband's wishes. This behavior, as well as the journey into the sea at the end of the novel suggests that she has become awakened to the oppressive nature of her husband and that of the institution of marriage in general. The very act of Edna's struggle, her resistance, suggests her awareness that there is a way of speaking and thinking that will accurately reflect her desires, her worldview and her 'self'. She muses on the gap between what she feels and what society decrees must be:

> By all the codes which I am acquainted with, I am a devilishly wicked specimen of the sex. But some way I can't convince myself that I am (p.82).

The first half of the novel takes place in Grand Isle, an island off the coast of Louisiana. Over the summer, it is inhabited by upper-class Creole families from New Orleans who go there to escape from the heat and to relax by the ocean. During the week, the women and children stay on the island, while the men return
to the city to work. The people Edna meets and the experiences she has on Grand Isle awaken desires and urges for music, sexual satisfaction, art, and freedom. The writer chooses Léonce Pontellier, Adèle Ratignolle, Mademoiselle Reisz, and Robert Lebrun, Alcee Arobin and Mariequita as the representation of the society because they appear as the most influential persons than other characters in the novel. The reason why the writer chooses Léonce Pontellier as one of the most influential person is because Léonce represents the characteristic of Creole husband. While Adèle Ratignolle represents the ideal Victorian woman, Mademoiselle Reisz serves as an inspiration to Edna throughout her gradual awakening. Later in the story Mademoiselle Reisz is shown to be the only person who understand Edna’s desire for freedom. Robert Lebrun plays an invaluable role in Edna’s life of passion. Alcee Arobin and Mariequita also give contribution in the process of Edna’s Self-actualization.

In the early stage of her awakening Edna’s consciousness of being an individual begins to appeal to herself. She begins “to realize her position in the universe as a human being, and to recognize her relation as an individual to the world within and about her” (p.14). She first begins to see how her marriage with Leonce has been established. She married Leonce mainly because she wanted to free herself from the distressing situation at her home, in Kentucky farmland after her mother died.

After six years of her marriage, her relationship with Leonce deteriorates because of her ambition of establishing her “position in the universe as a human being.” Now, for Edna, her husband is more a disappointment than a delight. It
happens because Leonce, in his forties, is too chauvinist fixated with idolizing his wife as a “mother woman”.

“Although he (Leonce) believes he loves his wife, although he is a kind and generous man, although he seeks and follows the best advice he can get in his marital confusion, Leonce’s immersion in the culture that idolizes the “mother-woman” precludes his ever understanding his wife’s awakening need for autonomy. … But all the thought of his forty years, his entire way of looking at life, blind him to see the fact that a woman may properly have a “position in the universe as a human being” apart from her place as a wife and a mother” (David J. Nordloh, ed., Twyne’s United States Author Series, Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1985, p.89-90).

Here Leonce fails to retain his position supposedly the most important man in Edna’s life. If Leonce could have come to understand Edna’s awakening need for autonomy, the marriage might have stayed intact.

Robert also appears for Edna at the beginning of Edna’s awakening. Robert appears as a ‘Blageour’ who devotes himself to a different woman each summer. This time he devotes himself to Mrs. Edna Pontellier. In the guise of demon lover Robert approaches Edna. Gradually Edna becomes very fond of him: she accepts his attentions, his services, and his affection. When Edna senses that Robert’s devotion is almost total, Edna knows that she has found an extension of her will and desires.

However, as the relationship between Edna and Robert begins to affect their behavior, Edna is repeatedly dismayed when Robert’s actions deviate from her wishes. Early in the story the author has shown this sign when Edna feels dismayed when Robert leaves her one evening, and did not return. It reveals that Robert does not really want her.
“She wondered why Robert had gone away and left her. It did not occur to her to think that he might have grown tired of being with her the lifelong day. She was not tired, and she felt that he was not. She regretted that he had gone. It was so much more natural to have him stay, when he was not absolutely required to leave her” (p.40).

Edna’s reaction to Robert’s absence in the episode quoted above foreshadows her distress by the separation from Robert when he has gone to Mexico.

“But can’t you understand? I’ve grown used to seeing you, to having you with me all the time, and your action seems unfriendly, even unkind. You don’t even offer an excuse for it” (p.45).

A hundred times Edna imagines Robert’s return, and thinks of their first meeting. When Robert does return, the happiness of having him back does not last very long before becoming disappointment. The day following his return, Robert departs a second time, leaving a note that says “Good-bye – because I love you.”

Robert’s second desertion proves to Edna that Robert is just the same as her husband, Leonc Pontellier: neither understands nor appreciates her desire to really live, to live as a “real” woman.

The three other women in the story also disappoint Edna to a certain degree. First, Adelle Ratignolle. Adelle is Edna dear friend. Edna adores her beauty and her fidelity to her husband. But Edna is also disappointed to learn that she is the embodiment of the situation that Edna is now trying to avoid. Then Adelle presumably plays a role in Edna’s disappointment concerning Robert’s second desertion because she was called upon to help with Adelle’s child delivery just when Edna was in the middle of the romantic moment of declaring her love to
Robert. Then upon her return, instead of seeing Robert, she finds only his good-bye note.

Mademoiselle Reisz contribution to Edna’s disappointment is that she has made Edna realize that Edna is not a real artist (even though she sold some of her paintings) mainly because she cannot maintain herself living as an artist like Mademoiselle Reisz can, and does.

Mariequita contributes to disappointing Edna by making Edna feel that Robert can accept Mariequita’s freedom to flirt casually with different men but refuses to accept Edna’s relationship with Alcee Arobin. Mariequita has made Edna realize and she is disappointed to learn that there is no one (including Robert) who can better comprehend her need to be recognized as an individual and her right to autonomy. All of Edna’s disappointment builds up the climax of the story. The picture that appears in the climax is one of a woman who kills herself, not because of an overburdened heart torn by many complicated duties but it is rather because of disappointments.

1. The Characterization of Léonce Pontellier

Mr. Pontellier wore eye-glasses. He was a man of forty, of medium height and ather slender build; he stooped a little. His hair was brown and straight, parted on one side. His beard was neatly and closely trimmed (p.1). In the novel we can see that Mr. Pontellier, as a husband, represents patriarchal society. He is certainly neither a villain nor a brute, but merely an ordinary husband, a little selfish, a little
insensitive, and greatly conventional (xxii). All the people in the society knew him as a good man.

Mr. Pontellier was a great favorite, and ladies, men, children, even nurses, were always on hand to say good-by to him. All declared that Mr. Pontellier was the best husband in the world. Mr. Pontellier was forced to admit that she knew none better (p.7-8).

But sometimes he criticizes his wife’s arrangement of activities, which differs from his own. He remarks that it is “folly” to go bathing at that hour and in that heat. Léonce’s attitude toward Edna is essentially proprietary.

“You are burnt beyond recognition,” he added, looking at his wife as one looks at a valuable piece of personal property which has suffered some damage (p. 2).

He is the one to blame for the “condition” of his wife, Edna. In the first scene of The Awakening, after being scolded by her husband about not being a good mother, Edna responds by crying, and later with defiance, refusing to come in to sleep, according to her husband’s wishes. Edna at this point is thoroughly awake in two senses. Physically, she does not desire to go to bed, but more important, emotionally and spiritually, she is alive to the significance of her husband’s tone and to her own strong need to listen instead to her own inner voice.

She perceived that her will had blazed up, stubborn and resistant. She could not at that moment have done other than denied and resisted. She wondered if her husband had ever spoken to her like that before, and if she had submitted to his command. Of course she had; she remembered that she had. But she could not realize why or how she should have yielded, feeling as she then did (p.33).

This behavior, as well as the journey into the sea at the end of the novel suggests that she has become awakened to the oppressive nature of her husband and that of
the institution of marriage in general. The very act of Edna's struggle, her resistance, suggests her awareness that there is a way of speaking and thinking that will accurately reflect her desires, her worldview and her 'self'.

While Léonce continually expresses devotion for his wife and concern for the well being of his family, he seems to hold a double standard regarding his and Edna’s respective roles in their marriage. Early in the novel, Léonce returns home late after a night at the club, but rather than allowing Edna to sleep, he insists on waking her to tell her about his evening. He expects her to perform the role of devoted audience, and yet earlier in the afternoon he shown little interest in speaking with her, leaving to go to the club just after she returned from her swim. It seems that Léonce invents a fictitious fever for one of their sons out of his annoyance with Edna’s disinterest, Edna finds nothing wrong with Raoul when she checks on him. When Edna returns from her son’s bedroom, Léonce proceeds to reproach her mothering skills. He upsets Edna and then falls asleep, leaving her to deal with her discontent on her own.

Though he means no harm in his treatment of Edna, Léonce is not entirely blameless. His sparse knowledge of his wife may be the result of his prioritization of work over family. During their summer vacation on Grand Isle, he spends the weekdays working in New Orleans, “eager to be gone” because he looks forward “to a lively week in Carondelet Street.” Furthermore, he takes a long business trip when the family returns to New Orleans, despite having been concerned enough about Edna’s behavior to warrant going to the doctor for advice. It is only in her
husband’s absence that Edna truly changes, discovering herself and the pleasures offered by others.

Because he sees Edna as a possession and not as an equal, Léonce never makes an effort to understand her feelings, nor does he seek out her opinion on any matters. Moreover, just as one might choose one’s clothing or furnishings based on what they will “say” to others who see them, Léonce worries not about Edna herself, but about what others think of her and how this will reflect back on himself. He cares most about his social standing. For example, when Edna abandons her Tuesdays at home, Léonce warns her that she could jeopardize their place in high society instead of asking about the motivations behind Edna’s actions. Similarly, when he learns that Edna plans to move out of the big house, he does not express concern for her decision to remove herself from the family home, a symbol of their marriage and relationship, but worries instead about what the move might suggest to others about his financial situation. When Edna disobedys his wishes and moves out of their house into her own “pigeon house” around the corner, he sends detailed orders from New York for renovations on his home. Léonce tries to make the people think that Edna’s removal to other quarters will seem a part of his grand plan for the improvement of his house. He again succeeds to save face and the society will be satisfied that all goes well with the Pontelliers. As a respectable member of the society it is his job to make sure that everything goes well.

Thus while Léonce does dote upon his wife and works hard to bring money into the household, it is really only her material well being and comfort
that he makes the “sole object of his existence”: he does not possess enough insight to worry about her emotional and psychological health. Indeed, Léonce regards Edna as a pretty pet and the finishing touch to the traditional household, one could read the above quote with a certain irony: for in Léonce’s eyes, Edna is indeed an “object.”

2. The Characterization of Adèle Ratignolle

Adèle is a devoted wife and mother, the embodiment of nineteenth-century womanhood. Emma Jones, in her study of Kate Chopin’s novel *The Awakening* says that

Society of the nineteenth-century gave a heightened meaning to what it means to be a woman. According to the commonly known ‘code of true womanhood’, women were supposed to be docile, domestic creatures, whose main concerns in life were to be the raising of their children and submissiveness to their husbands.

(https://www.english-literature.org/essays/chopin.html)

As a woman who represents the ideal Victorian woman, Adèle Ratignolle, spends her days caring for her children, performing her domestic duties, and ensuring the happiness of her husband.

“The mother-women seemed to prevail that summer at Grand Isle. It was easy to know them, fluttering about with extended, protecting wings when any harm, real or imaginary, threatened their precious brood. They were women who idolized their children, worshipped their husbands, and esteemed it a holy privilege to efface themselves as individuals and grow wings as ministering angels” (p. 8).

Ironically, while Adèle is comfortable and happy with her simple, conformist existence, she unintentionally catalyzes Edna’s movement away from
such a lifestyle with her manner of speech: because she and her fellow Creole women are so clearly chaste and irreproachably moral, society allows them to speak openly on such matters as pregnancy, undergarments, and romantic gossip. Adèle’s conversation reminds Edna of the romantic dreams and fantasies of her youth, and Edna gradually begins to uncover the desires that had been suppressed for so many years.

“That summer at Grand Isle she began to loosen a little mantle of reserve that had always envelope her. There may have been – there must have been – influences, both subtle and apparent, working in their several ways to induce her to do this; but the most obvious was the influence of Adele Ratignolle (p.14).”

Although Adèle’s behavior represents that which is expected of Edna, the effect of her words proves more powerful than her example.

Adèle is a static character—she shows no change or growth from the beginning of the novel to its end. She is also somewhat simple: when Edna reveals to Adèle that she would give up her money and her life for her children but not herself by saying:

“I would give up the unessential; I would give my money, I would give my life to my children; but I wouldn’t give myself. I can’t make it more clear; it's only something which I am beginning to comprehend, which is revealing itself to me (p.51).”

But Adèle cannot understand what more one could give than one’s own life. She said to her:

“I don’t know what you would call the essential, or what you mean by the unessential,” said Madame Ratignolle, cheerfully; “but a woman who would give her life for her children could do no more than that-your Bible tell you so (p. 51).”
Edna’s understanding of an inner, autonomous spirit defies the belief of the time that women were simply the property of their husbands, who served a specific role as wives and mothers and devoted themselves solely to those around them at their own expense. Later in the novel, it is apparent that Adèle still views a woman’s life in terms of the service she performs for her family and society. When she suspects Edna of having an affair with Alcée Arobin she reminds Edna of her duty to her children.


Having just given birth to another child, Adèle still represents the ideal Victorian woman, whereas Edna ignores her responsibilities to husband and children, seeking freedom up until, or perhaps even through, her death.

3. The Characterization of Mademoiselle Reisz

Mademoiselle Reisz is an unconventional and unpopular older woman who serves as an inspiration to Edna throughout her gradual awakening. A small, homely woman, Mademoiselle is distant and reserved in her interaction with the other guests on Grand Isle.

She was a disagreeable little woman, no longer young, who had quarreled with almost every one, owing to a temper which was self-assertive and a disposition to trample upon the rights of others (p.26-27)

Although she is often called upon to entertain people at gatherings with her expert piano playing, she realizes that Edna is the only one of the guests who is truly touched and moved by the music. Mademoiselle Reisz seeks out Edna shortly
after Robert’s departure to Mexico, and her exchange with Edna by the shore fosters a relationship that continues upon their return home to New Orleans. Edna is inexplicably drawn to the older woman, whose lifestyle she envies, despite finding her disagreeable and difficult. In fact, neither Edna nor Mademoiselle Reisz can claim to be particularly fond of the other, but Mademoiselle Reisz understands Edna’s passions and enjoys the company and the opportunity to share her thoughts on art and love.

“...I really don’t believe you like me, Mrs. Pontellier.”
“T don’t know whether I like you or not,” replied Edna, gazing down at the little woman with a quizzical look (p. 67).

Through her relationship with the pianist, Edna increases her awareness of herself as a woman capable of passionate art and passionate love. While the two capacities are interconnected, Mademoiselle Reisz serves to further each specifically. Not only is the pianist in touch with her own artistic emotions, she is, on a more pragmatic level, in touch with the traveling Robert and is the only one to whom he speaks of his love for Edna.

Mademoiselle Reisz is the woman that Edna could have become, had she lived into her old age and remained independent of her husband and children. Mademoiselle functions as a sort of muse for her young companion, acting as a living example of an entirely self-sufficient woman, who is ruled by her art and her passions, rather than by the expectations of society. Mademoiselle Reisz acts as a foil for Adèle Ratignolle, who lives the socially accepted lifestyle that Mademoiselle Reisz rejected for solitude and freedom.
4. The Characterization of Robert Lebrun

Although he remains away in Mexico for much of Edna’s awakening, Robert Lebrun plays an invaluable role in its beginning and end. His flirtations, along with Adèle’s freedom of expression, inspire Edna to forget her reserve and to begin revealing herself to others. For several summers, Robert has devoted himself to women at Grand Isle, showering them with affections rooted in admiration but lacking serious intent.

Robert each summer at Grand Isle had constituted himself the devoted attendant of some fair dame or damsel. Sometimes it was a young girl, again a widow; but as often as not it was some interesting married woman (p.10-11).

Although notoriously ruled by his passions and impulses, he nevertheless cannot forget the societal conventions that both allow and limit his actions. Unlike the Creole women who play along with his flirtations, enjoying the company and attention, Edna is swept away by Robert’s devotion. She sees in him a promise of the love and excitement that have been missing from her life since she married Léonce. Her husband seemed to her now like a person whom she had married without love as an excuse (p.83).

Although he never consummates their relationship physically, Robert’s tender treatment to Edna proves that his love for her extends beyond the superficial adoration he is used to showing his female companions. When Robert recognizes the intensity of his feelings for Edna, he decides to go to Mexico because he cannot bear to be near Edna and know that he may never act on his love.
Robert’s courtship of Edna on Grand Isle perches precariously on the boundary between innocence and misconduct, suggesting that defiance and daring may lie beneath his reputation as a harmless flirt. Robert’s sudden return from Mexico and his unrealistic plan to request that Léonce set Edna free so that Robert may make her his wife manifest a bolder side to Robert’s nature. However, Robert pragmatically recognizes the difference between daydream and reality. When he returns to New Orleans, he accepts the impossibility of his intentions, and he ignores Edna’s claims of independence and self-ownership. Despite his sincere love and urgent lust, Robert cannot, as Edna has, escape from or ignore the rules of society. The note he leaves when he flees her house sums up for Edna the unjust, unchangeable state of the world around her. Robert’s ultimate fidelity to convention and society solidifies her disappointment with life and with the role she is expected to play. While Edna despairs over Robert’s rejection of her, her suicide is not a response to her disappointment but rather to the final awakening that affords her. When even Robert, whose love matches the sincerity and desperation of her own, will not trespass the boundaries of societal convention, Edna acknowledges the profundity of her solitude (http://www.sparknotes.com/lit/awakening/canalys.html).

C. The Influence of the Several Characters in the Society in the development of Edna’s effort toward Self-Actualization
Six years before her awakening, when Edna accepts Leonce’s marriage proposal, she was actually in love with a tragedian, whose picture she often kisses when she is alone.

It was in the midst of her secret passion (with the tragedian) that she met him (Leonce). … the acme bliss, which could have been a marriage with the tragedian was not far for her in this world. As the devoted wife of a man who worshipped her, she felt she would take her place with a certain dignity in the world of reality, closing the portals forever behind her upon the realm of romance and dreams (p. 18).

As the daughter of a “hypocritical, gambling, toddy drinking, pious talking Presbyterian father” who had “coerced his own wife into her grave,” Edna had little means to fulfill any of her basic needs for love, a sense of belonging, and autonomy, before she meets Leonce. So the opportunity to satisfy some of those needs led her into the marriage. Six years later, however, Leonce cannot provide Edna with the freedom necessary to satisfy her need to become a self-actualized individual. This time Edna awakened to the need to become an individual rather than a wife whose husband treats her like “a valuable piece of personal property,” and the mother of two children.

The awakening occurs while Edna is vacationing on the Grand Isle. There Edna meets Robert Lebrun, a gentle, soft spoken young man, the eldest son of the owner of the cottage which the Pontelliers rented. Robert is described as a “blageour” who devotes himself to a different woman each summer. He befriends Edna before they finally fall in love with each other.
Robert’s devotion, gallantry, and liberal attitude presents the opportunity for Edna to see herself to be in a relationship with a man who can suggest freedom.

The reason should be clear enough: Edna’s awakening corresponds with the attention she receives from Robert who reifies the realms of romance anesthetized by Leonce while her ultimate desire is freedom, not to find the man of her dreams (Laurence Thorton, The Awakening: A Political Romance, American Literature – A Jounal, Vol. LII, March 1980, No.1 p. 58).

Robert plays an important role in Edna Awakening. First he fuels Edna’s awakening, so much so that his absence while in Mexico only increases the strength of Edna’s awakening. It is Edna’s honor that he leaves so abruptly to Mexico. Even though Edna is disappointed to learn that Robert has gone to Mexico, his leaving makes her realize the strength of her passion for Robert, which then fuels her desire for Freedom.

Edna admits that Robert’s absence makes her life rather devoid of diversion. “It is very dull without him,” she says. To ward off the dullness, Edna begins to experiment with freedom by neglecting her duties and setting herself against any element of les convenances. She neglects her children and housekeeping; she spends a good deal of time walking around town; she resumes her painting, and she even strikes up a relationship with the notorious playboy Alcee Arobin. And most significant is that she moves out of the Pontellier house to a small house not very far away.

When Edna moves out of her husband’s house, she is presumably in the process of becoming autonomous. And her submission to the playboy Alcee
Arobin indicates the period when her inhibited passions need satisfaction. Edna cannot withstand the “acute longing which always summoned into her spiritual vision the presence of the beloved one” anymore (Kate Chopin, The Awakening, W. W. Norton & Co.).

Madame Ratignolle is a beautiful Creole Woman. She is devoted to her husband and her children. She is physically beautiful, which is intensified by the way she dresses, in lace and white ruffles. She is the quintessence of the “mother woman.” To show the important of Adelle in the story, Chopin makes Edna’s awakening progress simultaneously with Adelle’s pregnancy. The nine-month structure of the novel signifies motherhood as opposed to womanhood.

“At the beginning of the novel, Adelle’s pregnancy was no way apparent.” During the ensuing months, “the mother-woman’s” gestation progresses, so does Edna’s search for herself, until finally Edna’s tragic suicide follows almost immediately after Adelle’s painful childbirth.”(David J. Nordlo, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985, p.89-90)

As motherhood dominates the lives of both Adelle and Edna, the issue of motherhood versus womanhood eventually ends in the fashion that womanhood is more fallible. Edna’s effort to establish a stronger hold on the importance of her womanhood is the core of the story. Since Adelle is the reflection of her dissatisfaction with her own motherhood, to Edna she appears as an antagonist. Even though Edna admires Adelle’s beauty and fidelity, she dislikes her personality. To Edna, Adelle conveys her impression of selfless individual.

“She was moved by a kind of commiseration for Madame Ratignolle, -- a pity for that colorless existence which never uplifted its possessor beyond the region of blind contentment, in which she would never have the taste of life’s delirium.”(p. 56)
Mademoiselle Reisz is an eccentric and accomplished musician whose personality gives so much inspiration to Edna’s attempt at liberty. She is the figure of contrast to Adelle Ratignolle. She is not married and she likely to scorn the company of most people. In contrast to Adelle Ratignolle, She dresses in black. For Edna she represents courage and freedom. Edna likes to visit her, to listen to her play the piano and her comforting speeches about freedom and also because Madmoiselle Reisz is Edna’s only source of news about Robert.

There was nothing which so quieted the turmoil of Edna’s senses as a visit to Madmoiselle Reisz. It was then, in the presence of that personality which was offensive to her, that the woman, by her divine art, seemed to reach Edna’s spirit and set it free (p. 47).

The way Mademoiselle Reisz demonstrates courage and freedom is in contrast to Edna’s method of pursuing those. Edna cannot see a bit further beyond her immediate vision of freedom. If compared to Mademoiselle Reisz, Edna lacks clearness of mind. Mademoiselle Reisz has a clear mind: through her music she can see that Edna has a very tender personality. For Edna’s part, artistry and freedom of this single woman are seen as very attractive. Edna resumes her painting to see for herself that she has the artistry, courage and freedom of an artist. This is an effect of Mademoiselle Reisz saying that: “to be an artist includes much: one must posses many gifts – absolute gifts – which have not been acquired by one’s own effort, And, moreover, to succeed the artist must posses the courageous soul, The brave soul The soul that dares and defies”(p.63-64).

Mademoiselle Reisz is an example of a free and independent woman whose hardiness Edna must posses if she is to succeed in her search for liberty –
“to soar above tradition and prejudice (p.70). Mademoiselle Reisz, although older than Edna, is closer to Edna than any of the other ladies probably because she can give Edna directions and advice as Edna tries to find a place for her new self. Mademoiselle Reisz gives her apartment to Edna to refuge to get away from family life. There she plays the piano for Edna, and she can comfort Edna with news about Robert and encouraging speeches about freedom.

Mariequita is the other example of a free woman beside Mademoiselle Reisz. She is a young Spanish girl, beautiful and sensuous, who has always avoided marriage. Mariequita had been Robert’s lover. They broke up after Robert found out that she also had had an affair with his brother Victor. Edna sees Mariequita first on the boat which she and Robert take when they go to Cheniere Caminada. Sometimes during the trip Mariquetta had conversations in Spanish with Robert. Edna notices that Mariequita appeals to Robert by “making eyes.” Edna does not mind that, and she envies Mariequita’s freedom in being able to flirt casually with men.

In her new house, “the pigeon house,” Edna is able to act like Mariequita. There she can freely flirt with Alcee Arobin, the person who can fulfill her sexual desire. Somehow, Mariequita’s show of Freedom leads Edna to her resolve to disregard the prevailing moral code. She knows that what she does is despised by society; after Alcee leaves in the night Edna feels “an overwhelming feeling of irresponsibility. There was the shock of the unexpected and unaccustomed. … but among the conflicting sensations which assailed her, there was neither shame nor remorse” (p.83).
Even though Mariequita only appears twice in the story, before Robert leaves for Mexico and just before Edna drowns herself in the ocean, she makes a significant contribution to the development of Edna’s awakening. Mariequita awakens Edna’s Sensuousity.
CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

This chapter presents a conclusion of the previous discussion. Examining the problem formulations, the writer finds that the tapestry of the novel is the dramatization of the larger conflict between an individual and society. As we already know that a self-actualizing person thinks that she has a freedom of choice and action. She does not passively conform to her society. A self-actualizing person stands on what she thinks is right. She says the truth is truth and the falsehood is falsehood according to her. She may be hindered by any sanctions from her society. Becoming a self-actualizing person is not instant, something that just happens soon. It deals with a process of actualizing her potentialities, characteristics and capabilities; one may face difficulties and obstacles from other people who are contrary with what one actualizes.

Edna Pontellier is a respectable woman of the late 1800s who not only acknowledges her sexual desires, but also has the strength and courage to act on them. Breaking through the role appointed to her by society, she discovers her own identity independent of her husband and children. At the beginning of the novel, Edna exists in a sort of semi-conscious state. She is comfortable in her marriage to Léonce and unaware of her own feelings and ambitions. Edna felt that her marriage to Léonce is the end to her life of passion and the beginning of a life of responsibility. But later on the novel we can see that Edna learns that her husband was just a person she married without love as an excuse.
The society in the novel is described as a conservative upper class Creole family. Society of the nineteenth-century gave a heightened meaning to what it meant to be a woman. According to the commonly known 'code of true womanhood', women were supposed to be docile, domestic creatures, whose main concerns in life were to be the raising of their children and submissiveness to their husbands. In Kate Chopin's *The Awakening*, Edna Pontellier has turned down these expected roles, and, consequently, suffer because of it.

The people Edna meets and the experiences she has on Grand Isle awaken desires and urge for music, sexual satisfaction, art, and freedom that she can no longer bear to keep hidden. Like a child, Edna begins to see the world around her with a fresh perspective, forgetting the behavior expected of her and ignoring the effects of her unconventional actions.

Although the text never presents Edna’s escape from tradition as heroic, it also never declares her actions shameful. The narrative may sometimes portray Edna as selfish in the ways she acts out her defiance of convention, but it never portrays Edna’s defiance itself as intrinsically wrong. Perhaps, even, the novel portrays Edna’s rebellion as intrinsically right. Given the book’s ambiguity, Edna’s decision to commit suicide at the end of the novel can be read either as an act of cowardice—of submission to thoughts of her sons’ reputations and to a sense that life has become too difficult—or as an act of final rebellion—of refusal to sacrifice her integrity by putting her life in the hands of controlling powers.
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